

155hh- You Don't Need To Say No To Everything.

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(A Summarised Transcription Of A Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

Nm: What needs to be restrained? Do you say no to everything, to whatever your eye wants to see or whatever your nose wants to smell? How would you know what to say no to?

Q: Depends on my motivations.

Nm: So what would be the motivation for restraint?

Q: Wanting pleasure and not wanting pain.

Nm: Well, you always want pleasure, you always don't want pain. That's the implicit starting point. Whatever you do it's done for the sake of pleasure, and you trying to say no to every desire, to everything, will also be done for the sake of pleasure. So you'll be denying everything for the same reason, and therefore it won't free you from the problem.

The sole purpose of restraint is to develop context regarding your motivations. You have to understand that you wanting to practice restraint is rooted in the same desire, that's what the Buddha meant when he said desire is to be abandoned by the means of desire, but not simply that desire can be abandoned through the desire, or that just by craving, you will abandon craving. No, you crave for freedom from craving initially, but if you start looking at the context of your motivation, where things are rooted, what type of intention is behind what you want to do, what you've done or what you're planning to do, that's then how you make craving redundant. By avoiding doing things that perpetuate craving, because not all things perpetuate craving. Not all things perpetuate ignorance. Things that are rooted in lust, aversion, and distraction perpetuate craving and ignorance.

Lust, aversion, and distraction are not IN things that you are doing. They are in your motivations that make you act for those reasons. And that's what the Buddha said :

“Thought and lust are a man’s sensuality,
Not the various things in the world;
Thought and lust are a man’s sensuality,
The various things just stand there in the world;
But the wise get rid of desire therein.” -An.3.63

If you want to uproot lust, aversion and delusion, it's not simply by doing this and abstaining from that, it's by knowing your intentions behind your actions and refraining from acting out of the unwholesome. But for that to be discerned you need to first restrain your habitual action towards the beautiful/wanted, habitual action away from the ugly/unwanted, habitual action from distracting yourself from boredom, but not for its own sake, only for the sake to see how lust, aversion, delusion are actually on the level of your intentions, your

choices, and not in the senses or sense objects.

That's also how 'virtue and duty' is a fetter, it's you assuming lust, aversion, delusion to be in these things that you're now abstaining from, and by abstaining from it, you think that's all you need to do. If you think that your mission is accomplished, by abstaining from bad things, you will not look for where the badness of bad things is rooted. Which is in your intentions.

So when we talk about sense restraint, you take on the precepts, and then within that, you see what the mind presents you with. If you say, I will not do anything because everything is rooted in desire, that will be rooted in desire. That's your desire. If you say, I will stop thinking, that is your thought. So you can't just decide to step outside of the problem. You are made up of the problem, your existence is the problem.

So you take on the precepts, you take on sense restraint, on the level of faith first, and now you go throughout your day, having to do things and you can't stop doing and you shouldn't stop doing. You just want to know where your motivation is rooted and if you wonder, how far to go with that? Well, you go within the precepts. If things that are presented to you to be done, would be breaking the precepts, you just say no to that. You don't need to overthink that side of things. But if it's within the precepts, doesn't mean "Oh, I can do it justifiably because it's not breaking the precepts", nor is it "I must deny everything, because everything is rooted in desire". No, the same thing today can be rooted in one motivation, but tomorrow it can be rooted in another motivation. But if all you see is the thing that you either always say yes or no to, you're never going to see your motivation, which is where the whole problem has always been. The lust, aversion, delusion can never step outside of the domain of your intention and enter these things in the world. It always remains within your intention.

First, you need to recognize your intention, your motivation, then the more effort you make towards discerning it, the clearer the discernment will become.

You might say "The problem is in the desire towards this and that. So I'll say no to that, but now I have a desire to say no to everything. So I'll say no to that". So you just start saying no to more and more things and wind yourself up completely and equally have no perspective in as much as if you were engaging with sensuality. That's like the ignoble way of that self-mortification and denial of everything.

You have the precepts and within that, you question things, for example: "I want to go for a walk. Why? Oh, because I'm restless. Okay, yeah, that's not the perfect motivation but is it a sensual motivation? Is it because I'm hoping to experience a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, that will excite me? No, not specifically just because it's too hot under this roof and I want some breeze. Okay, that's alright. I'm not sure how ideal it is or not, but I know that it's not as bad as sensuality or as breaking the precepts". So you do it. You go for a walk because you want some breeze, you want some comfort. But then next time that you want to go for a walk, you re-evaluate. You don't just do it again because you've done it before. So is it still rooted in comfort? Yes. Is it still not rooted in sensuality? Yes. But can you perhaps endure the discomfort and not go for a walk? You always want to see where your motivation is rooted. Like, why do I want the breeze and the comfort? Because I'm sleepy, and I'll fall asleep, but if I go for a walk, I'll be awake and then I can spend more time diligently practicing. If that's the reason, then you don't need to fear doing it.

You need to maintain perspective on your intent, and you will get to know that perspective by keeping the precepts and practicing sense restraint, by creating the boundary within which you can discern when your mind moves towards or over the boundary of the precepts. That's also why the Buddha never allowed ascetic practices like living at the root of a tree and so on, as mandatory because, for some, such actions might be rooted in the unwholesome.

Discern your intent behind your current situation, and say no to the unwholesome.

When you start doing this it will seem restrictive but when you get used to it, you will see that a whole space opens up whereby you can do many things which do not partake in or maintain the unwholesome. And by no longer maintaining unwholesome intentions through acting out of them, they will have to diminish and eventually cease.

Agreeable or disagreeable things do not cause your suffering, it's your intent which is the cause. Knowing your intent while keeping the precepts, that's how your mind will develop rightly, and if you get confused about your intent just step back and question what your intent is in trying to not be confused and in doubt, which will then reveal your intent. Sometimes it is difficult to find your intent but it is always right there, it's the basis for anything you are about to do or are doing.

The clearer the perspective you have on the mind, the easier it will be to not act on unwholesome intentions.

People act habitually, addictively because there is no perspective on their situation. Once the perspective is increased through one's effort then what constitutes sense restraint is self-evident. You only restrain things that are rooted in the unwholesome, you don't restrain everything because that's like starving yourself to death.

Initially and more often than not, you might need to be restraining more than usual, to be on a safer side. That's why the Buddha would always lean on the side of asceticism*, even if in itself it does not necessarily result in wisdom. Just don't become neurotic and say no to everything. Because that means that you'll lose context and won't be aware of your intent.

*** Mn.3 - Dhammayada sutta:**

“...Now, monks, suppose that I had eaten, refused more food, had my fill, finished, had enough, had what I needed, and some alms-food was left over to be thrown away. Then two monks arrived hungry and weak, and I told them: ‘Monks, I have eaten and have had all I needed, but there is this alms-food of mine left over to be thrown away. Eat it if you like; if you do not eat it then I shall throw it away where there is no greenery or drop it into the water where there is no life.’ Then one monk thought: ‘the Blessed One has eaten and had what he needed, but there is this alms-food of the Blessed One left over to be thrown away; if we do not eat it the Blessed One will throw it away, but this has been said by the Blessed One: ‘Monks, be my heirs in Dhamma, not my heirs in material things.’ Now this alms-food is one of the material things. Suppose that instead of eating this alms-food I pass the night and day hungry and weak.’

And instead of eating that alms-food, he passed that night and day hungry and weak. Then the second monk thought: 'the Blessed One has eaten and he has had all that he required, but there is this alms-food of the Blessed One left over to be thrown away. Suppose that I eat this alms-food and pass the night and day neither hungry nor weak.' And after eating that alms-food he passed the night and day neither hungry nor weak. Now although that monk by eating that alms-food passed the night and day neither hungry nor weak, yet the first monk is more to be respected and commended by me. Why, because the willpower that he has demonstrated shall contribute to the fewness of his wishes, contentment, effacement, easy support, and arousal of energy. Therefore, monks, be my heirs in Dhamma, not my heirs in material things."